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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Merciful God, You alone have brought us to this moment. Help us to hear Your whispers and to follow Your leading. Speak to our lawmakers about the difficult issues of our time, reassuring them that You continue to take control of our destinies. Teach them to count their blessings, cultivating an attitude of gratitude. Give us the wisdom to shut out yesterday's disappointments and tomorrow's fears. Lord, show us how to live in day-tight compartments with total dependence on Your mercy and grace. Help us to cherish the freedom of this land as You continue to emancipate us from sin's slavery.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

FILLING THE SUPREME COURT VACANCY AND GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD LABELING BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in the last national election, the American people elected a Republican Senate. Since then, we have accomplished

a lot of important things for our country—landmark education reform, permanent tax relief for families and small businesses, significant action to repair America's roads and bridges—and, just last week, decisive steps to address the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic. The Republican Senate has been able to lead on many important issues because we focused on areas where both sides can agree, rather than just fight about issues where we don't.

Everyone knows one issue where we don't agree; that is, whether the American people deserve a voice in filling the current Supreme Court vacancy. Republicans think the people deserve a voice in this important vacancy. The President and Senate Democrats do not.

Whoever is chosen to fill the Supreme Court vacancy could radically change the direction of the Court for a generation. The American people obviously deserve a voice in such an important conversation. They can continue making their voices heard, and we can continue doing our work in the Senate to move America forward on important issues.

Americans elected this Republican Senate to serve as a check-and-balance to the President. It is natural that both parties will disagree in some areas. It is natural we will find common ground in others. Let's keep focused on those areas of common ground.

For instance, today I hope colleagues across the aisle will join us in working to protect middle-class families from unnecessary and unfair increases in their food and grocery bills. Vermont passed food-labeling legislation that will be implemented soon and could increase annual food costs across America by more than \$1,000 per family. It is one State's decision, but it could negatively affect families—especially lower and middle-income families—in other States. Now we see other States following in Vermont's footsteps, which

could lead to a patchwork of State laws. We should work to protect America's middle class from the unfair higher food prices that could result, and that is just what the Senate is working to do now.

We know this may be the last chance to stop this economic blow to the middle class, but we can't act if colleagues block us from helping the middle class. As our Democratic colleagues know, we are eager to continue working toward a solution. I would encourage our colleagues across the aisle to work with the bill managers to offer the amendments or alternative proposals they may have.

The commonsense, bipartisan legislation offered by Chairman PAT ROBERTS of the Agriculture Committee would set clear, science-based standards in order to prevent families from being unfairly hurt by a patchwork of conflicting State and local labeling laws passed in places where they don't even live. This bipartisan bill would help meet consumer interest for information about how food is made, while keeping costs from rising at every level of production. It has earned the support of more than 650 groups nationally, including farmers and small businesses. As Kentucky's agriculture commissioner put it, this bipartisan bill would "allow for a more efficient flow of food to consumers everywhere and would cut down on production costs."

We know this is not a safety or health issue. It is a market issue. Officials at both USDA and the FDA—the two agencies charged with ensuring the safety and delivery of our Nation's food supply—have found there are no health, safety, or nutritional risks associated with bioengineered crops and products. At the same time, we recognize that many families have a desire to know what is in the food they are purchasing. That is why the legislation Chairman ROBERTS is working on would offer incentives for the marketplace to provide more information to

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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